

PHIL 353 TOPICS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Ethics and Economics

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Occidental College

Spring 2009

T/R 130-255

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course investigates the intersection of ethical and economic decision-making. The first part of the course considers some of the core methodological issues at the intersection of ethical and economic decision-making, including the positive/normative distinction, objectivity and evidence, as well as normative and empirical models of rationality. With the lessons taken from these methodological problems, the second part of the course investigates two policy areas: gun control and drug prohibition. In particular, we shall evaluate two hypotheses currently debated by policy makers, the controversial claim that “more guns equals less crime” and “prohibition economics” in the war on drugs.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Hausman and MacPherson, *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1996).
2. Lott, *More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws*, 2nd edition (Chicago, 2000).
3. Miron, *Drug War Crimes: The Consequences of Prohibition* (Independent, 2004).

There will also be required and recommended articles to read that can be found on the electronic reserves website for this course. The textual editions and/or translations I have selected can be found in the Occidental College Bookstore (x2630). They are affordable and you must use these editions since we will be reading the texts closely as a class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The course requires *minimally* completing the following assignments. No late assignments or email submissions will be accepted without prior approval, which will NOT be granted as last minute requests in person or by email. No exceptions.

(1) Presentation (2 pp.)	10 percent	TBD
(2) Short papers (5 pp.)	50 percent	2/24, 4/7
(1) Long paper (10 pp.)	40 percent	5/5

Class attendance and participation is expected. There are five basic rules in this classroom: (1) read all assigned material before class and bring it with you, (2) ask questions if you don't understand, (3) participate in the discussion if you have something to say, (4) respect others, and (5) turn off your wireless devices.

It is the policy of Occidental College to make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you require such accommodations to complete your course requirements, please see me no later than the second week of classes. For information on documentation requirements for such requests, contact the Center for Academic Excellence (x2849).

This syllabus represents a contract. As students you are expected to fulfill your obligations in this course, just as the Administration, Faculty, and students of Occidental College have a right to expect me to fulfill my duties as instructor.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Plagiarism is misrepresenting the work of others as your own. Plagiarizing published material and more general forms of academic misconduct like borrowing other students' papers will be turned over to the Judicial Examiner. For such academic dishonesty it is standard to receive an "F" for the course, as well as additional punitive measures. There is an Academic Code at Occidental College that can be found at the following link: <http://departments.oxy.edu/studentlife/studenthandbook/academic.policies/academic.ethics.html>

SCHEDULE (Tentative)

1. Positive/Normative Distinction (1 week)
 - (a) Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics"
 - (b) Weston, "Toward a Better Understanding of the Positive/Normative Distinction in Economics"
 - (c) Hausman, "Why Look Under the Hood?"
2. Objectivity, Explanation, and Evidence (2 weeks)
 - (a) Kuhn, "Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice"
 - (b) Laudan, "The Epistemic, the Cognitive, and the Social"
 - (c) Cartwright, "The Vanity of Rigor in Economics"
 - (d) Seckinelgin, "Evidence-based Policy for HIV/AIDS Interventions: Questions of External Validity, or Relevance for Use"
 - (e) Putnam, "Objectivity and the Science-Ethics Distinction"
3. Models of Rationality, I: Normative (Rational Choice) (1 week)
 - (a) Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*
 - (b) Hausman and McPherson, *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy*, Ch. 4-5
4. Models of Rationality, II: Empirical (Bounded Rationality) (2 weeks)
 - (a) Sen, "Rational Fools"
 - (b) Elster, "Social Norms and Economic Theory"
 - (c) Elster, "Sour Grapes"
 - (d) "Kahnemann and Tversky on Behavioural Economics"

5. Ethics, Economics, and Decision-Making, I: Welfare and Consequences (1 week, Midterm)
 - (a) Hausman and McPherson, *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy*, Ch. 6-8
6. Ethics, Economics, and Decision-Making, II: Rights and Justice (1 week)
 - (a) Hausman and McPherson, *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy*, Ch. 9-11
7. Ethics, Economics, and Decision-Making, III: Capabilities (1 week)
 - (a) Sen, "Capability and Well-Being"
 - (b) Nussbaum, "Feminism and International Development"
8. Case Studies, I: Firearms Policy (2 weeks)
 - (a) Diaz, *Making a Killing: The Business of Guns in America*
 - (b) Lott, *More Guns, Less Crime*
9. Case Studies, II: Prohibition Economics and Drug Policy (2 weeks)
 - (a) Thornton, *The Economics of Prohibition*
 - (b) Miron, *Drug War Crimes: The Consequences of Prohibition*